United Nations A/63/332

General Assembly

Distr.: General
26 August 2008

Original: English

Sixty-third session
Item 67 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives

Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/167, in which the Assembly decided to continue its examination of the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its sixty-third session a comprehensive report on the situation in that country.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has not recognized the resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has not to date succeeded in engaging the Government of that country in a substantive dialogue on the situation of human rights there. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has not accepted the High Commissioner's offer to engage in technical cooperation activities, as recommended in the resolutions. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, appointed by the Human Rights Council, has not been extended any cooperation or granted access to the country by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The Secretary-General registers his serious concern at the lack of tangible progress on the part of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in addressing the range of serious human rights concerns mentioned in resolution 62/167.

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

** The present report was submitted after the deadline so as to include the most recent developments.

08-49092 (E) 290908

The report outlines the status of the engagement and cooperation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with international human rights mechanisms such as the treaty bodies, special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council. The report also contains information submitted by other United Nations agencies concerning the right to food, the right to health, the rights of the child and the rights of refugees.

Particular attention is drawn to the food situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and its impact on the population. The Secretary-General welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Government of that country to facilitate external food aid and promote food sustainability. He advocates the need for the Government to allocate budget resources and adopt policy measures to alleviate the impact of the food situation, and highlights the need to prevent discrimination in the distribution of food and health services.

The Secretary-General also welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to facilitate access for humanitarian relief and to increase cooperation with United Nations agencies. He renews his call on the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to sustain cooperation with the United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors. He urges the international community to continue to support humanitarian efforts.

The Secretary-General urges the Government to safeguard fundamental rights and freedoms and show visible signs of domestic legal reform so as to fulfil its treaty obligations and comply with international standards. He renews his recommendation that the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea engage in a constructive dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights. He stresses the independent role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and appeals to the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to positively consider its offer of technical cooperation. He also urges the Government to grant access to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The Secretary-General welcomes the positive developments under the six-party talks and calls upon all regional and international actors to facilitate the creation of an environment conducive to generating greater engagement between the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the international community. Furthermore, he hopes that through gradual cooperation and incremental confidence-building measures, the United Nations will be able to take on a greater role in helping to promote and protect human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Contents

		Page
I.	Introduction	4
II.	Cooperation with international human rights mechanisms	6
	A. Treaty bodies	6
	B. Special procedures	6
	C. Universal Periodic Review	8
III.	Role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in assisting the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the promotion and protection of human rights	8
	Technical cooperation	8
IV.	Assistance extended by the United Nations system for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea	9
	A. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	10
	B. World Food Programme	10
	C. World Health Organization	12
	D. United Nations Children's Fund	14
	E. United Nations Population Fund	15
	F. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	16
V.	Conclusions and recommendations	16

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/167, in which the Assembly decided to continue its examination of the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at its sixty-third session and requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

2. Since the previous report of the Secretary-General (A/62/318), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has not succeeded in engaging the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in a substantive dialogue on the situation of human rights in that country. Offers of technical assistance made by the High Commissioner for Human Rights have been rejected by the Government. In addition, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has not, regrettably, been allowed access into the country since the establishment of his mandate in 2004. Visit requests by other special procedures mandate-holders have similarly not been granted. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has indicated that it does not recognize the resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/7/15) and the General Assembly (62/167) on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Government has stated that it considers the resolutions selective and politicized and that they reflected double standards. The Government does not accept technical assistance from OHCHR; the proposal for technical assistance is recommended in both resolutions, which the Government rejects.

3. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a party to four of the seven core international human rights treaties: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The country's third and fourth periodic reports concerning the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child will be examined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child at its fiftieth session, in January 2009. However, its periodic reports concerning the implementation of the other three core human rights treaties remain outstanding.

4. The Secretary-General registers his serious concern at the fact that he is unable to report substantive progress on the part of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in addressing the range of serious human rights concerns outlined by the General Assembly in its resolution 62/167. Reports emanating from the country continue to indicate trends of arbitrary arrests, absence of due process and the rule of law, torture, inhumane conditions of detention, public execution, ill-treatment of refugees or asylum-seekers repatriated from abroad, and forced labour. In addition, reports also indicate that the population is being denied the freedoms of thought, religion, opinion and expression, peaceful assembly and association, movement and access to information. The separate report submitted to the Assembly at its sixty-third session by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea provides a more detailed account of those concerns.

5. Although their veracity could not be independently confirmed, reports from a range of sources continue to cite a high number of public executions. There is

allegedly a crackdown on petty economic criminals, whose number has increased owing to the current serious food shortages and difficult living conditions, which have also led to an increase in the number of *kkotjebi* (homeless children). When forcibly repatriated, nationals who had left the country without State permission continue to face interrogation, mistreatment and sometimes torture, followed by imprisonment and forced labour. Punishment for the family members of defectors has reportedly been used as a deterrent to prevent defection. There have been continued accounts of prisoners being subjected to forced labour, ideological rehabilitation and sometimes torture, many of whom allegedly suffer from malnutrition and chronic diseases. Female prisoners are allegedly subjected to sexual assault and forced abortion. The trafficking of women for the purposes of prostitution and forced marriage also continues to be reported. It is regrettable that, owing to the lack of a substantive dialogue and technical cooperation with the Government, the latter's views on the situation regarding human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea could not be more fully reflected in the present report.[1]

6. The Secretary-General also highlights his particular concern about the severity of the food situation the country is currently facing and its impact on the economic, social and cultural rights of the population. In a 2008 New Year editorial carried by major newspapers in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, it was stated that the food deficit was a national problem, and a series of measures was outlined to respond to the situation. The editorial stated that no other task was more urgent or more important than solving the people's food problem. The World Food Programme (WFP) warned in July 2008 that millions in the country were at risk of slipping towards precarious hunger levels. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reported that the cereal deficit for the 2007/08 marketing year (November to October) was estimated at 1.66 million tons. On a positive note, in June and July 2008 the Government agreed to increased food assistance and to the expansion of the operations of United Nations agencies such as WFP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in the country. WFP and FAO were able to conduct a food security assessment aimed at correctly identifying the populations and regions most in need. The Secretary-General is encouraged by the Government's recognition of the urgency of the problem and its desire to address the issue of the people's sustainable access to food, and he welcomes the Government's extension of cooperation to the United Nations agencies and encourages the international community to lend its full support to efforts to address this specific issue.

7. The Secretary-General is further encouraged by the positive developments under the six-party talks aimed at the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. As he has stated previously, he urges all participants to intensify their efforts and dialogue so as to further advance this multilateral process and contribute to the resolution of bilateral issues. He also welcomes the signing by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum in July 2008. Peace and stability in North-East Asia will serve as a catalyst for greater engagement between the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

[1] The present report was sent to the Permanent Mission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations Office at Geneva for comments.

and the international community on a range of issues, including the promotion and protection of human rights.

8. The present report updates information on cooperation by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with international human rights mechanisms and on the activities undertaken by the United Nations, in particular by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to promote and protect human rights in the country. The report also contains information submitted by other United Nations agencies concerning the right to food, the right to health, the rights of the child and the rights of refugees.

II. Cooperation with international human rights mechanisms

A. Treaty bodies

9. On 10 December 2007, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea submitted its combined third and fourth periodic reports (CRC/C/PRK/4) concerning the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been due on 20 October 2007. The Committee on the Rights of the Child will examine the report at its fiftieth session, in January 2009.

10. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has yet to submit its third periodic report concerning the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was due in January 2004; its second periodic report concerning the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was due in March 2006; and its third periodic report concerning the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which was due in June 2008.

B. Special procedures

11. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has to date not issued a standing invitation to the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and has not accepted the requests to visit the country made by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

12. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the right to food sent two written communications to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, on 20 March and 7 April 2008, respectively, seeking clarification concerning alleged human rights violations. The first communication, which was sent jointly by the Special Rapporteurs, dealt with alleged public executions. The second communication, which was sent by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, dealt with the safety of nationals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who were

returned to the country. No response has been received from the Government to date.

1. Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

13. On 27 March 2008, the Human Rights Council decided to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for a period of one year.[2] The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea stated at the seventh session of the Human Rights Council that it resolutely opposed and rejected the continuation of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has argued that the resolution establishing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur "is a product of political confrontation", that "the existence of the 'Special Rapporteur' has been consistent with unjust manipulations" and that "elimination of the 'Special Rapporteur' really conforms to the current trend against politicization of human rights" (see A/HRC/7/G/3). The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has to date not extended any cooperation to the Special Rapporteur and has not approved his requests to visit the country.

14. The Special Rapporteur visited the neighbouring countries of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — Mongolia (15-21 December 2007), Japan (15-19 January 2008) and the Republic of Korea (19-24 January 2008) — to gather information on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from a variety of Government, civil society and United Nations interlocutors. He highlighted the unresolved issue of persons abducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as the protection needs of those fleeing the country and the issue of family reunification.

15. The Special Rapporteur submitted his last report to the General Assembly (A/62/318) on 26 October 2007 and to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/7/20) on 13 March 2008. In the latter report, the Special Rapporteur analysed the information relating to human rights and the development process; access to food and other necessities; rights and freedoms; displacement and asylum; groups of special concern; and the consequences of violence and violations. The Special Rapporteur will submit a separate report to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

2. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

16. In its latest report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/7/2), the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances stated that it had transmitted nine cases to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, all of which remain outstanding.

17. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea transmitted three communications to the Working Group, dated 8 January, 10 April and 7 August 2007, respectively. The Working Group found that the responses did not contain

[2] In accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolutions 2004/13 and 2005/11. In its decision 1/102, the Human Rights Council decided to extend all mandates and mechanisms transferred to it by the Commission on Human Rights pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/251.

sufficient information to clarify the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared persons. The Working Group hopes that the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will adopt effective measures to clarify the outstanding cases.

C. Universal Periodic Review

18. One of the innovations introduced by the Human Rights Council with the intention of ensuring the even-handed assessment of countries is the Universal Periodic Review system. The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations Office at Geneva has actively participated in the review of reports submitted by other Member States at the first and second sessions of the Universal Periodic Review, held in 2008.

19. The review of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea under the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review will take place at the sixth session of the Review, scheduled to be held in 2009. In that regard, the High Commissioner for Human Rights offered technical assistance to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (see paras. 20-22 below). The Secretary-General encourages the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to engage with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in this process.

III. Role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in assisting the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the promotion and protection of human rights

Technical cooperation

20. The High Commissioner for Human Rights invited the Permanent Representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations Office at Geneva to a meeting on 11 February 2008, with a view to exploring ways of initiating technical cooperation between the Office of the High Commissioner and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

21. During the meeting, the High Commissioner suggested areas in which technical assistance could be offered to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in particular in the light of the forthcoming review of the country under the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review mechanism, scheduled be held in 2009. The High Commissioner suggested that technical assistance could be extended in the areas of human rights treaty body reporting and ratification of core human rights treaties. She also suggested that an OHCHR assessment mission could visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with a view to exploring such possibilities with the relevant officials on the ground.

22. The Permanent Representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea reiterated that his Government did not recognize the resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Government considered that the resolutions were selective and politicized and reflected double standards. The Permanent Representative stated that his Government was therefore unable to accept

the High Commissioner's offer. The Permanent Representative nonetheless stated that he had taken note of the High Commissioner's willingness to offer technical assistance and that his Government would continue to respect its treaty obligations and cooperate with treaty bodies. To date, no further communication has been received from the Government on this matter. A note was subsequently prepared by the secretariat of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/7/47). The Secretary-General encourages the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to respond positively to the High Commissioner's offer of technical assistance.

IV. Assistance extended by the United Nations system for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

23. In a letter dated 26 May 2008, the High Commissioner for Human Rights invited United Nations bodies to submit to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights relevant information on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Office subsequently received relevant information from the following United Nations entities: the United Nations country team in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,[3] the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the World Food Programme (WFP); the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); the World Health Organization (WHO); and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

24. The United Nations country team in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea observed that 2007 was marked by a gradual rapprochement with the international community, with several positive developments in the political and security arenas. According to the country team, this created a more conducive environment for foreign aid and investment, which translated into more resources flowing into the country. Nevertheless, international funding continues to fall well below the level required by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to revive key sectors of the economy and restore basic social services to the levels enjoyed before 1995. Owing to the absence of international financial institutions and major bilateral aid programmes, the United Nations system continues to play an essential role in development, recovery and emergency aid, capacity-building and the facilitation of international contacts and other forms of engagement between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the international community.

25. Torrential rains in August 2007 caused severe flooding, landslides and mudslides in nine provinces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and in Pyongyang. In response to the Government's request for international assistance, United Nations agencies and two resident international non-governmental organizations jointly developed an integrated response plan and appealed for $14.1 million to address the most pressing needs in the areas of food, health and water and sanitation. Donor response was swift, and the appeal was 105 per cent

[3] The United Nations country team in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea currently comprises five resident United Nations agencies — FAO, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. Three agencies have their representatives based in Pyongyang (UNICEF, WFP and WHO), while FAO, UNFPA and UNESCO have representative offices with regional coverage in Beijing.

funded. As a result, more than 5 million flood-affected people received humanitarian supplies and benefited from rehabilitation interventions. Cooperation with national counterparts was marked by a degree of openness, which included the granting of temporary visas for additional international emergency staff and permissions for rapid assessments and the monitoring of affected/supported areas. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea publicly thanked the United Nations system and the donor community for the emergency support. In June and July 2008, cooperation with the Government took another step forward, as United Nations agencies were allowed increased access to carry out their mandates within the country.

A. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

26. FAO reported that total cereal output decreased steeply to about 3 million metric tons, compared with 4 million tons in 2006, following heavy floods in August and September 2007 and the subsequent poor harvest. That brought to an end the steady recovery in agricultural production that had been under way since 2000. The cereal deficit for the 2007/08 marketing year (November/October) is estimated at 1.66 million tons on the basis of a per capita cereal-equivalent consumption close to 170 kg (including potatoes and soybeans). The downward trend in imports since the 2000/01 marketing year will therefore need to be reversed.

27. Winter/spring production by double-cropping was expanded by an extra 202,000 hectares, with increased cultivation of potatoes relative to that of wheat and barley. Indications so far point towards higher early potato crop production than last year, despite fertilizer shortfalls and inclement weather. Since no donation of fertilizer has been received this year, fertilizer allocation to cooperative farms is approximately 50 per cent less than in previous years. The fertilizer shortage is the main constraint so far affecting prospects for the main season cereal crops (rice and maize).

B. World Food Programme

28. WFP noted that rising domestic food prices, limited external assistance and a large domestic food gap could result in aggravated vulnerability levels for some areas of the country already suffering from chronic food insecurity and high rates of malnutrition.

29. WFP observed that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to be vulnerable to flooding in the summer months, which has a significant impact on the agricultural sector. According to Government reports, the August 2007 floods were concentrated mainly in the southern and western parts of the country, which account for the majority of the country's agricultural production and also recorded the largest drop in harvest output. According to the FAO/WFP nationwide Rapid Food Security Assessment carried out in June and July 2008,[4] transfers of food from these normally surplus "cereal bowl" provinces to the deficit northern provinces are much

[4] The FAO/WFP nationwide Rapid Food Security Assessment qualitatively determines the food security situation of particular population groups in terms of food availability, access and utilization.

reduced. The northern provinces are generally considered to be more vulnerable to food insecurity owing to their mountainous terrain, harsher weather and remote location. WFP/UNICEF nutritional surveys consistently indicate higher malnutrition rates in those regions; a decrease in access to food could result in aggravated vulnerability levels there.

30. In early 2008, the public distribution system was to have officially resumed food distribution to all its dependants (approximately 70 per cent of the population) following the temporary disruptions that occurred immediately after the August floods. The media, however, continued to report that distribution in most provinces of the country was limited to selected population groups, and other international organizations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have received reports of serious cuts in rations under the system. WFP monitoring showed that progressive cuts had led to rations of 150 grams of cereals per person per day in June 2008, down from 450 grams in early 2008.

31. WFP monitoring shows that food intake in general remains poor, with most of the population subsisting on a diet of cereals and vegetables insufficient by far in terms of protein, fat and micronutrients. A reduction in public distribution system rations could have adverse consequences for the food security and nutrition of vulnerable groups, which lack purchasing power or the ability to access other food sources. Most of those who depend on such rations are urban dwellers who are already suffering from the effects of unemployment and economic regression and who have limited access to land for growing crops or rearing animals. The FAO/WFP nationwide Rapid Food Security Assessment found that close to three quarters of households have reduced their food intake, that more malnourished and ill children were being admitted to hospitals and institutions, and that diarrhoea caused by increased consumption of wild foods was one of the leading causes of malnutrition among children under the age of 5.

32. Over the past year, the price of rice has tripled and that of maize quadrupled. Owing to the limited purchases made by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the international market, the increase in prices is more likely the result of decreased domestic supplies than of the international global food crisis. The steep increases in market prices of basic commodities can have serious consequences for the food security of the poorest as the importance of markets as a food source grows.

33. The continued application of measures intended to limit private-market trade may have had an adverse effect on the ability of some people to access food or resources. The 1 October 2007 ban on the involvement of women aged 40 years or less in food-market activities, aimed at ensuring that they work for State agencies, reportedly remains in place, as does the ban on market trade in cereals.

34. The duration of the food deficit will depend in large part on the country's ability to sufficiently rehabilitate the agricultural sector and resume making the progressive advancements in production experienced from 2001 to 2005. Prospects are uncertain owing to the continuing shortages of fuel, machinery and quality inputs such as chemical fertilizer. The lack of sufficient chemical fertilizer in time for the May/June planting season raises concerns over the outlook for the 2008 fall harvest.

35. The steady drop in both multilateral and bilateral food aid since the end of 2005 has increased concerns relating to the country's ability to obtain sufficient external resources to cover the food deficit. WFP continues to account for the bulk of multilateral food aid to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Early in 2008, WFP was reaching up to 1.2 million people in 50 counties in five provinces. The beneficiaries were mainly traditionally vulnerable and food-insecure groups, such as small children in nurseries, kindergartens and primary schools, as well as pregnant and lactating women. Total WFP food assistance came to 37,000 metric tons in 2007, including the emergency food assistance provided in response to the August 2007 floods. The Government indicated to WFP early in May that it would welcome increased emergency food relief to help alleviate the food shortages caused by the floods and the low harvest output. The Government has also made attempts to source external food aid to alleviate the food problem. At the time of writing, in July 2008, 22,600 tons of food aid had been delivered by WFP, and some 110,000 tons had been received from China. Moreover, up to 500,000 tons of assistance has been pledged by the United States of America, and 3,000 tons have been received from the Russian Federation. The offer by the Republic of Korea of 50,000 tons of corn remains. Despite these donations, there is still a deficit of more than 1 million tons.

36. In June 2008, the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea agreed to increased food assistance through an agreement with WFP. The agreement would expand WFP operations in the country and allow humanitarian access to many areas currently not receiving international food aid. As of July 2008, WFP had access to 131 counties, up from 50 counties last year, and approval of visas for up to 59 international staff, a significant improvement over the 10 visas granted in 2007. New emergency operations will cover about 6.5 million people. WFP has made numerous household visits and has for the first time been able to visit county warehouses. The improved operating conditions will enable WFP to better assess the situation in terms of food security, agriculture and nutrition/health, significantly improve its ability to correctly identify the hungry and ensure better targeting and monitoring of food aid. Overall, the first four weeks of the WFP augmented operation (reaching around 3.7 million people) has seen good cooperation from central, provincial and county officials.

37. During the FAO/WFP Rapid Food Security Assessment conducted in mid-2008, the Government cooperated well with WFP to enable the mission to take place: visas for extra international staff were made available and access to households and hospitals was granted, and WFP was permitted to randomly select which counties to visit among the 160 accessible counties. The findings of the assessment, which gives precise information on the nature of the shortages and the level of response needed, will guide the programme design of future WFP operations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

C. World Health Organization

38. WHO reported that the health system of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is still recovering from the setback the country suffered in the 1990s. Limited resources for humanitarian assistance were allocated to the sectors of health, water and sanitation. Although population health indicators have started to improve, some vulnerable groups, especially women and children, are still experiencing major

hardships due to the limited capacity of the national health system to respond to their needs.

39. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has the fundamentals of a very strong health system, underpinned by an extensive health workforce in which one medical doctor provides clinic-based and outreach health services for every 130 households. This primary care system is backed up by a substantial network of health facilities, extending from primary-care inpatients at *ri* (primary health-care unit) hospitals to tertiary-level care at national hospitals. While the number and distribution of the health workforce is not the issue, given the health system constraints and epidemiological and demographic changes, the quality and composition of that workforce may require further review. In terms of training and supervision, the country has in place strong systems for pre-service and in-service training. However, institutions and their staff are underresourced, and greater focus is placed on knowledge acquisition rather than on skills acquisition or competency assessment.

40. Many current practices in the health and medical field in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are obsolete as a result of several decades of professional isolation. A long-term training programme for staff at all levels of the health sector is needed, both within and outside the country. The quality of health care provided in *ri* clinics and county hospitals is low as a result of the poor condition of buildings, the lack of water and other services, poorly maintained essential medical equipment and the lack of supplies. Health professionals have limited knowledge and skills in relation to best international practice. Children and women in particular receive inadequate anaesthetics and poor-quality surgical and medical treatment.

41. The current WHO programme in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea focuses on key health priorities, including maternal and child health; control of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and vaccine-preventable diseases; the strengthening of the capacity of the Ministry of Public Health for disease surveillance and outbreak response; health promotion; control of non-communicable diseases; and the strengthening of the health system. Those programmes are implemented through a policy dialogue and a combination of professional training to improve skills and knowledge and the provision of essential medical supplies, equipment and medicines.

42. WHO concluded that an improvement in the health services in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea can best be achieved through a long-term, well-balanced development programme and by addressing the main components that are crucial to developing a sustainable health system. Despite the underlying problems facing the health services in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, several important results have been achieved. Public health indicators have improved as a result of increased immunization coverage, a reduced incidence of malaria and a tuberculosis control programme with nationwide coverage. That progress has been achieved through programmes implemented by the national authorities with support from external agencies based in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and generously backed by assistance from a number of external donors.

D. United Nations Children's Fund

43. In August 2007, UNICEF supported a comprehensive emergency response in flood-affected counties in the areas of health, nutrition, education and water supply. In October 2007, a rapid nutritional screening conducted in selected areas of the 19 most flood-affected counties indicated that 13.9 per cent of the children under the age of 5 who were screened showed signs of acute malnutrition. It is likely that the high incidence of diarrhoea and the food shortfall due to harvest losses caused by floods may have further aggravated the nutritional situation of children.

44. To address the poor nutritional situation of women and children, UNICEF is continuing to support a wide range of interventions aimed at preventing and treating malnutrition. In late 2007, an effective nutritional paste known as ready-to-use therapeutic food was introduced in all baby homes to treat severely malnourished children before complications arise. Baby homes are institutions that cater to children without primary caregivers, who usually have the highest risk of severe malnutrition. In addition, a pilot programme on the community-based management of severe acute malnutrition, also involving the use of ready-to-use therapeutic food, was initiated in one county in July 2008. Based on the results of the pilot, this community approach will be gradually expanded.

45. On the basis of the lessons learned during the flood response, UNICEF and other agencies worked with sectoral ministries in the first half of 2008 to reinforce flood preparedness in the areas of health, water supply and education. Critical emergency supplies are being pre-positioned in various locations to respond to a flood scenario affecting 25,000 families. In April 2008, UNICEF completed the rehabilitation of three county town gravity-fed water-supply systems, which are providing safe water to more than 80,000 people.

46. In April 2008, UNICEF and the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea also agreed to invite two international child-protection specialists to conduct an assessment of the situation of children without primary caregivers living in institutions and to recommend an action plan that will enable UNICEF and the Government to improve the level of care for children living in such institutions.

47. In order to strengthen protection against measles and avoid further outbreaks, UNICEF and WHO supported the introduction of the second dose of measles vaccines, which started in June 2008.

48. In the area of education, UNICEF is continuing to work with the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education through the introduction of life-skills-based education on health and hygiene, the revision of the mathematics curriculum in primary school, the refurbishment of teacher-training colleges in selected county towns, and the improvement of the learning environment in selected schools, with a focus on school sanitation.

49. In July 2008, UNICEF and other agencies regained access to three remote northern provinces that are known to be the most vulnerable in the country and that had been closed since early 2007. As a result, UNICEF resumed its assistance, providing essential medicines and nutrition supplies to support basic health and nutrition services. Additional progress is evidenced by the fact that UNICEF has managed to obtain the secondment of a few technical local staff (two engineers and

one nutritionist). Finally, UNICEF is able to conduct more capacity-building activities in all sectors.

E. United Nations Population Fund

50. UNFPA has been supporting information education and communication activities at the national and grass-roots levels to promote reproductive-health rights, gender equality and equity, and HIV/AIDS prevention through various country programmes. UNFPA has also been seeking to expand the range of contraceptive methods available in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, so that women in both rural and urban areas can have greater choice in terms of contraceptives, reduce the need for abortion (in particular repeated abortion) and meet the needs for family planning. It is estimated that to sustain a contraceptive prevalence rate of above 55 per cent, $2 million worth of contraceptives are needed per annum in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. That remains a great challenge for the Government, which has scarce resources, and for the few international organizations working in the area.

51. UNFPA provides support on issues relating to women's health in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in particular to that of pregnant women. UNFPA reports with great concern a sharp increase in the rate of maternal mortality in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, especially in the late 1990s, from 50 per 100,000 live births to more than 100, due primarily to consecutive natural disasters which had a tremendous negative impact on women's nutritional status, as well as to the collapse of the national economy, which dramatically widened the resource gap in the area of health, in particular maternal and child health.

52. While the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has a modest level of maternal mortality compared with other countries in the region, there is still insufficient credible data on maternal mortality available. The discrepancy in the maternal mortality rates quoted by various sources, which have ranged from 80 per 100,000 live births to 1,000 in the past few years, is too great to allow for the assessment, with any degree of credibility, of the maternal health situation. To tackle that challenge, UNFPA is working with the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to conduct a population census in October 2008 that will include key questions on maternal mortality and from which credible, reliable data on maternal mortality can be generated for a more accurate interpretation, in 2009, of the maternal health status of the country. It is also important to underline the joint efforts made by UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity, with the active participation of the Ministry of Health of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Through such efforts, a national strategy for reproductive health and a joint national training protocol at different service levels have been developed to guide the efforts of various international agencies and the Government in working towards a reduction in the rate of maternal mortality and morbidity.

F. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

53. UNHCR continues to observe that a constant flow of nationals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continue to leave the country to seek protection, assistance and/or settlement elsewhere. Such movements have given rise to a number of concerns: reports that the right to freedom of movement, including the right to leave the country, has been severely curtailed; an increased risk of smuggling and of trafficking in human beings, in particular women, for the purposes of prostitution and/or forced marriage; violations of the fundamental principle of non-refoulement by countries of transit; reports of severe punishment in case of forced return to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; restrictive policies applied by countries of transit, in particular arrest and detention; lack of enjoyment of basic social and economic rights; lack of access to legal stay and related documentation (even for long-stayers); no formal recording and/or documentation of vital events; limited possibilities with respect to regularizing the stay of children born of mixed parents (one national of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and a national of another country); and prolonged exit procedures that have a severe impact on the well-being of nationals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea awaiting settlement in third countries. Unaccompanied women and children are particularly affected by those issues. UNHCR continues to warn that, should the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea deteriorate and movement of its nationals increase, the countries of transit could find it difficult to cope owing to their limited capacity.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

54. **The Secretary-General welcomes the efforts undertaken by the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to engage external food aid and to address the population's need for sustainable access to food. He calls on the Government to allocate corresponding budget resources and to adopt policy measures to alleviate the impact of the food shortage and to ensure food security.**

55. **The Secretary-General welcomes also the efforts made by the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to facilitate humanitarian access. The increased operating space for the United Nations agencies to carry out their mandates will allow outreach to a larger part of the population in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Secretary-General calls on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to sustain cooperation with United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors. He also urges the international community to continue to support humanitarian efforts.**

56. **The Secretary-General highlights the need for the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to ensure that food is accessible to everyone in all locations of the country, including the most physically vulnerable — women, children, elderly people, people with disabilities or illnesses and those held in detention or prison camps. He also emphasizes the need for the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to extend health services to all without discrimination.**

57. **The Secretary-General is seriously concerned at the lack of tangible progress made by the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in other respects to safeguard fundamental rights and freedoms. He urges the Government to show visible signs of domestic legal reform so as to fulfil its treaty obligations and to comply with international standards.**

58. **The High Commissioner for Human Rights will continue to work with other United Nations agencies to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights for all nationals of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The High Commissioner will also resume previous efforts to engage in a constructive dialogue with the authorities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, with a view to establishing technical cooperation programmes in the field of human rights. In the light of the benefits of such assistance, the Secretary-General appeals to the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to positively consider this offer, which is made in good faith.**

59. **The Secretary-General urges the Government to allow access to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and to other special procedures to observe the situation of human rights in the country at first hand, as part of its cooperation with the Human Rights Council.**

60. **The Secretary-General welcomes the submission of the country's combined third and fourth periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and encourages the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to submit other treaty body reports that remain outstanding.**

61. **The Secretary-General also welcomes the positive developments under the six-party talks. He encourages all parties involved to intensify their efforts in the context of the dialogues and sustain the momentum of the process. Furthermore, the Secretary-General calls upon all regional and international actors to facilitate the creation of an environment conducive to generating greater engagement between the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the international community. The Secretary-General is hopeful that through gradual cooperation and incremental confidence-building measures, the United Nations will be able to take on a greater role in helping to promote and protect human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.**